Over the last week, we’ve seen endless coverage of what the BBC’s leading talent get paid.

While the media has focused on the top talent, the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) is talking about the BBC’s lowest-paid workers instead.

More than 20,000 people work at the BBC — and this story should be about more than the richest 96.

BECTU successfully turned the spotlight on low pay at the BBC  as the Corporation defended pay deals with its highest paid on-screen talent.

Speaking to the Press Association, head of BECTU, Gerry Morrissey, made revelations of his own asking why the union had met with resistance to its claim for a minimum BBC salary of £20K, first tabled in 2016, when many senior executives are paid in excess of £300K a year?

"Many staff involved in programme-making struggle to make a living wage, meanwhile the Corporation believes it's right to use the licence fee to pay huge sums to management at a time when BBC funding is under scrutiny."

The claim for a £20K minimum salary remains on the table as talks with the recognised unions - BECTU, the NUJ and Unite - continue on the pay review for 2017/18 alongside an overhaul of BBC terms and conditions.

Last week’s unveiling of the names of top on screen talent paid above £150K was forced onto the BBC by the government. BECTU opposed the plan to name the staff affected but backs the need for more transparency.

Controversially, last week’s roll call of close to 100 names showed a marked gender pay gap with women paid much less than their male counterparts and with several high profile women broadcasters not appearing on the list of those earning at least £150K.

The highest paid male broadcaster secures £2million a year, whereas the highest paid woman secures in the region of £450K. Just a third of the people on the list are women; amongst the top 20 on screen earners none are from an ethnic minority background.

Gerry Morrissey has insisted that the BBC's commitment to fixing the gender pay gap needs to reach beyond the top tiers to the rest of the organisation.

Across the broadcasting industry, engineers, runners, technical and production staff work long hours to keep shows running. Many of those workers are young. They enter at the bottom grade, hoping to get a foothold in the industry. Morrissey warns this can create space for exploitation.

While inequality exists across the industry, the BBC is a public sector employer and can be held to account for how it uses taxpayers’ contributions — both at the top and the bottom of the pay scale.

The treatment of behind-the-scenes staff isn’t as juicy as Graham Norton or Chris Evans’s pay.  But if we care about fair pay in the BBC, they’re two sides of the same coin.

Beth Farhat

Northern TUC Regional Secretary